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THE HOLY SPIRIT.

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# DISCOURSE

DELIVERED AT THE

ORDINATION OF GEORGE KNOX,

AS

PASTOR OF THE BAPTIST CHURCH IN TOPSHAM,

DECEMBER 15, 1841.

BY Z. BRADFORD,

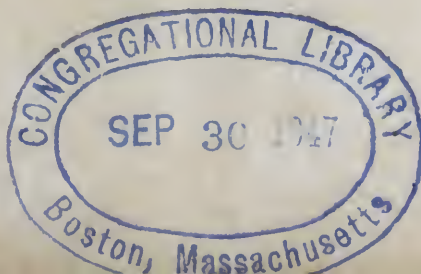
PASTOR OF THE BAPTIST CHURCH IN NORTH-YARMOUTH.

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# DISCOURSE.

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Z E C H A R I A H 4 : 6.

“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.”

**T**HE historical context of this passage will illustrate and impress its meaning. After the return of the Jews from their captivity in Babylon, in the reign of Cyrus, Zerubbabel, governor of Judea, laid the foundation of the second temple. This was done with solemn and imposing ceremony. The High Priest, robed in his gorgeous attire, bearing on his bosom the jeweled names of the tribes of Israel, the Prince, the Priests habited in professional costume, with trumpets in their hands, the Levites, with cymbals, and all the people celebrated the occasion. The vast assembly, with their feet once more planted on Mount Zion, sang praises to the God of their fathers, in responsive chants. “And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.” Loud hosannas to the Lord Jehovah,

once again rose from Moriah's summit, where the fragrant cloud of incense had burnt down and died for years.

But "many of the chief of the fathers, who were ancient men that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice," because of its prophesied inferiority in richness and splendor. "When the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin, heard that the children of captivity builded the temple unto the Lord God of Israel," they petitioned to join and build with them. Their motives however being apprehended, they were denied. They then made an attempt to poison the mind of the king and his cabinet, and inflame their jealousy against them. This they did, by sending them letters, and spreading reports that the Jews were building a rival city, or capital of their own; ultimately designing insurrection, and to become independent of Cyrus. How artful and politic is hate! A more effectual scandal could not have obtained; and such was its influence, that the work was arrested until the second year of the reign of Darius.

At this time Haggai and Zechariah, "in the name of the God of Israel," addressed themselves to "the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem" concerning the neglected temple. Henceforth a spirit of courageous life, and vital, steady purpose seemed to rise like a phenix from the ashes over which they built. Lest however Zerubbabel



might be disheartened by the magnitude of the work, and the fewness of the helpers or builders, God appeared unto Zechariah in the vision of the golden candlestick. It had a bowl on the top, to which were attached seven lamps by pipes. The bowl was fed with oil by two olive trees growing on either side of it. The angel of God asked the prophet if he knew what these were ? He replied, “no my Lord.” “Then he answered and spake unto me saying, this is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, *not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.*” That is, as the bowl of these lamps was replenished with oil without the help of man to fill and trim them, so let Zerubbabel understand, that it is not by multitudes, and the conjoined strength of many, that the temple is to be built ; but by the Spirit of God, animating, strengthening, and blessing the few, who toil for its re-erection. Not to symbolize this passage, giving each particular some riddle import, I remark there is a latter, and the last temple, now going up by those who have come from the captivity of sin. It is a spiritual structure, or building ; “the temple of God,” “which temple ye are.” The Holy Ghost, is the princely architect in laying up the precious stones of this edifice ; so that the builder, and the built are spiritual. And methinks, when the foundation, corner stone of this building was laid in the first redeemed soul, it revealed the character of God in a new light to angels, and created an

event that was celebrated at the very throne of Jehovah, in the sweetest, richest melodies of praise to his name.

Nothing but pure, redeemed, regenerated, spiritual material is wrought into this building. As Solomon's temple was erected without the noise of the hammer, or the clatter of instruments, all the stones being previously fitted with invariable exactness at the quarry and in the wilderness ; so the Holy Spirit, by a silent, noiseless process, now polishes and places up the stones of this latter building. He may, and often does work by human means ; but it is by his wisdom, benignity, and effectual power, that the work is done. To drop the figure. The Holy Spirit is the great agent in the conversion and salvation of men. He was the sole, ultimate agent in erecting the temple by Zerubbabel. This I consider as the doctrine of the text, and as a bible doctrine. I shall not therefore attempt to counterpoise human instrumentalities against the Spirit's agency, or compound them, deciding their ratio, or harmony in the work of salvation. I understand the text to say that the Holy Spirit is the one, and only agent, by whom God's intentions of grace are brought about. This will not militate against the doctrine of free agency, or obedience, or the use of means, more than the fact that God governs the seasons, the light and winds of heaven, precludes the importance of our improving them, to gain his blessing. So far from this, it inspires,

and nourishes hope ; is a lure to action—reveals the source of our strength, the author of our blessings, and can but lead us to acknowledge, and honor the divine Spirit. The object of informing Zerubbabel of this truth, was to quicken, not slacken and unman him for labor. The design of God in revealing the doctrine of the trinity, appears to be, that we may discriminate the office of each of the “Three-One” in the work of salvation. It eminently facilitates our understanding of the subject. God the Father originates, the Son came forth to execute, and the Spirit applies.

If any one shall feel that I ascribe too much to the Spirit in my subsequent remarks, and thus derogate from Christ, let him remember, that the gift of the Spirit, is the fruit of his mediation, and the purchase of his blood. Whatever value is attached to the office-work and blessings of the Spirit, must be primarily ascribed to Christ. So far from diminishing our obligations to our Redeemer, a just view of the subject will show they are more general, multiplied, and important, than could be known aside from the Spirit. Right views of divine truth are always important. Especially may our growth in grace and in the knowledge of God, depend, in a great degree, upon our opinion, and estimate of the character, and office-work of the Holy Spirit. We may suffer insensibly upon this point. We may pine, and droop, when we are not informed of the ultimate cause of our languishment. At least, of such



vital importance is the Holy Ghost in the work of salvation, that if we would profit from his ministrations, we should *venerate his character, respect his office, pray much for his influence, and walk according to his dictates*. How can we best please “ God the Spirit,” and secure his blessings ? is a question, I feel to be paramount to all others, and not inappropriate to this occasion. I wish my discourse to be considered as a contribution towards answering such an important interrogation.

I. VENERATE THE CHARACTER OF THE SPIRIT. It may be, when we reflect upon the shoreless love of the Father in the gift of his beloved Son, as a remedial sacrifice for sin, and upon the life, death, and intercession of Christ, that we often unknowingly forget the other great agent in saving men. Our impressions of the Father, and the Son, especially when their love for us is illustrated by the affection that subsists between the Trinity, are so overwhelming, that all the powers of the mind and the heart, seem to be absorbed, engulfed. But omit the Holy Ghost in this enumeration, as an equal with the Father, and the Son, and what to us, is all we can imagine beside ? What is the spontaneous love of the sovereign Parent, or the matchless compassion, the unspeakably precious blood of our blessed Redeemer ? What are even these to us, aside from what the Spirit makes them ? I speak with reverence ; they are nothing—a blank—a mere nullity, except as the good Spirit of our God



makes them otherwise to us. Considered apart from Him, they can afford us no consolation, pleasure, or good. Though we might see, and long to enjoy them, we should stand on the verge of an impassable abyss, limbless and wingless ; tantalized by fruitless hope. Let us then profoundly venerate the character of the divine Spirit.

Those in this latter day, who deny our Saviour's divinity, attempting to bereave him of his godship, and leave him widowed of his very nature, do him a deed of grosser disparagement than those who once allied Him to Baalzebub, the god of filth, or those who crowned him with thorns, and clothed him as a buffoon king. How can he bless them—love them, when they destroy and leave his character in ruins, so that he is no God ? That to which all our hopes are anchored, is gone. Can he love, bless them, when they so disesteem him ? If not, how can the Spirit savingly benefit those who consider him as a mere energy, or afflatus from God, and not a distinct, co-equal person in the tri-unity ? When his nature, and personality are not recognized, loved, and venerated ; can he bless us ? No. I know not as it is more a sin to deny God the Father, than God the Spirit ; or as it is less criminal to disesteem the character of God in the person of the Father, than in that of the Spirit. The want of reverence for the character of either person of the Trinity, is without doubt a sin against each. He then who does not adore the Holy Ghost, the same as the Father

and the Son, as an equal in the Godhead, equal in power, glory, honor—in all attributes—sins fearfully, first against the Spirit, and thereby against the “Three One.” Christ has taught us that the unpardonable sin has a primary connection with the Holy Ghost ; and that we should love, and venerate Him. He has taught us, that it is a greater offence to sin against, or disesteem the Spirit, than to do the same thing to himself.

II. RESPECT HIS OFFICE. Here again, I suppose we are liable to err, more it may be, in feeling, than in theory. Most of us, perhaps, have a more orthodox creed, than heart. Few would deny in so many words, the equal godship of the Spirit, or disparage his office, if they knew it. Still, our minds and hearts, may be so little impressed with the doctrines of the Spirit’s character, and office, that they may not stand out in strong relief, as great fundamental things, in our belief, and practice. It is a problem, how far the heart and life may be heretical, and we remain sound in the faith. Somewhat of this may obtain, upon the point now under consideration. Let either of us be interrogated concerning the office of the Father, in the plan of life, and salvation, and I suppose we should each together say—it originated and sprung spontaneously forth from his sovereign love. He was the great, self-moved originator, of the whole plan. Probably we should respond in a similar manner, to questions concerning the Son. But, should we be equally clear,

intuitively prompt, and feeling, in speaking of the office of the Spirit ? Do we consider, and feel that however much intrinsic excellence all that is revealed may have, though the love of the Father, or the offering of the Son, apart from the Spirit's office, is splendor, and wealth that cannot be enjoyed ? Do our prayers indicate that we prize the mediation of the Spirit, as much as sovereign love, or the blood of atonement ? Do we realize that the very character of the Father, is revealed only by the light of the Spirit ? Are we habituated to feel that the beauteousness, and loveliness of our blessed Lord, is brought to our minds, and hearts, only through the medium of the Spirit?—that God and Christ, and the holy oracles, are made to us what they are, but by the Spirit ?—that God never spoke to us, that our Redeemer never smiled, that truth was never otherwise than a killing letter, and that we love Christ, by the Spirit only ? I fear we have not this practical estimate of the Spirit's office ; and no marvel our piety is sickly.

Suppose God to come into this assembly, and elect some one of us—say you, beloved, to go to a distant planet, and reveal his character to its inhabitants. Suppose they were like us ; had sinned, and had the same way of salvation. Now, the Almighty says to you—Go ; reveal my infinite nature ; my uncreated, everlasting perfections ; my power, as Creator of all things ; reveal my Son ; the mysteries of redemption ; in-



interpret my mind, contained in my word ; convert them ; remake their immortality ; and taking my image for your pattern, finish them into my likeness ; so that I shall identify myself in them. What would you think of your office ? Would you not feel you had need to be God, for such a work ? This is the office-work of the Spirit, among us. You see that God, and Christ, if I may so speak, give themselves into the hands of the divine Spirit, and he declares them.

In nature, much depends upon the light, by which an object is seen. If the medium is imperfect, the object is seen indistinctly, and partially. And, the more various and rich in beauties and excellences an object is, the more important is the medium of vision. Hence, paintings of genius and rare execution, require a softened and peculiar angle of light to do them justice. The most careless observer, knows the vivacity and freshness of nature, robed in the sparkling glories of a morning atmosphere. If then, the Spirit's light is estimated by the subjects it reveals ; if it is adequate to give justice, and glory to the Father and the Son ; if they sit complacent and delighted in his perfect revelation, O, how transcendent, how ineffable, is his illumination ! By Him, the author, and the economy of saving grace are revealed to us in so penetrating and transforming a manner, that by His vital influence we are " born of God," " born of the Spirit." And can we, beloved, begotten by the Holy Ghost in

Christ, feel otherwise than as affectionate sons, towards the parent of our immortality ? Has nature endearing ties, and union sweet as life, by which she weds parents and children ? And shall not grace have higher, holier affinities, to join that which is “ born of the Spirit,” and “ is Spirit,” to its parental Creator ? It must. In the regeneration of souls, and their future sanctification, the adorable Spirit is emphatically *God the Father*.

III. LET US PRAY MUCH FOR THE SPIRIT’S INFLUENCE. Solomon’s heart appears to have been exercised with emotions too big for utterance, at the thought of God’s dwelling on the earth and in the temple he was building. How much more should we be delighted, when we are ascertained, that He whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, has wrought our hearts into a temple for his residence, if we are Christians ? He has done this by his Spirit. We have seen, it is by his light, that all is revealed in religion. Does He make truth powerful, and savingly efficacious ? Does He help our infirmities, and make intercession for us ?—does he like a carrier angel, bring us all our comforts, and peace ? O, who then, who of us, will not love, hunger, and thirst after his presence ? Does He arm us for temptation, and strengthen us for victory ? Does He wing our affections and lead us timorous into the presence of Jesus ? O, has He inaugurated God’s dear Son in our bosoms, so that “ God dwelleth in us ;” and by the eye of faith enshrined in our

hearts an antepast of heaven ? Blessed ! blessed Spirit ! we must, we will, covet thy influence with large, constant desires.

In proportion as we value reconciliation with God, the knowledge of his name, and grace, and in short, all that is desirable in religion in the same ratio, shall we desire, and pray for the Spirit's influence. The scriptures by giving instructions in regard to asking for, and exhorting us not to grieve away the agent, whereby we are "sealed unto the day of redemption," plainly show his influence is given most to those who most appreciate and desire it. Let us then remember our dependence upon, and our indebtedness to that great Artificer, which can make us anew, and build us into the walls of God's spiritual temple. Our struggle to live a devout and holy life, and to do good, will end in abortive weariness, so long as we make the attempt in our own strength. Let the Spirit practically have the honor of being the Creator, Sustainer, and Guide of "the new man," and we shall live and accomplish much. Otherwise, one could as well think of smoothing the heaving ocean with his hand, or hush the booming gale with the stamp of his foot.

IV. WE SHOULD DEMEAN OURSELVES AS THE SUBJECTS OF THE SPIRIT. It was not meet, to make the temple of Solomon, a house of merchandize. It is not proper our hearts, formed into the temple of God, should be shops of mammon. We are exhorted to "walk in the Spirit," which may



mean, to live according to the dictates or instructions of the Spirit ; to evince our respect for his authority, our love for his presence, and fear of his departure. He is a jealous God, and his honor will he not give to another. We are to honor him, by manifesting the fruits or works of his agency. The numerous exhortations and instructions contained in the word of God, designed to induce such conduct as is in accordance with the character of the Spirit, are fresh in your minds. The ordinances of the temple indicated its character. Thus the ordinances or acts of our deportment indicate what we are. Said Alexander to a soldier namesake of his, ‘ change your name sir, for your conduct disgraces the title of Alexander.’ Can men so demean themselves as to dishonor high names and royal birth ? How much more may they do it then, who are called “ the children of God,” and are “ born of the Spirit ?” Charlemagne once reprovngly said to some of his nobles who were dressed more finely than he thought befitting, “ for shame, learn to dress you like men, and let the world learn of your rank, by your merit, not your habit.” Christians are the nobles of the “ King of kings,” and his solicitude that they should “ learn to dress” themselves in the spiritual attire of his people, is far greater than the zeal of the French monarch for the manliness of his chamber cabinet. The world should learn their “ high calling,” by their holy life and godly carriage. The idol works of Baal’s wor-

ship would have been as fit for God's house, as is a worldly life for a child of the skies. If then we would enjoy the light, comfort, and love of the Holy Spirit, may we so live that he shall not be grieved, and hurt by our deportment.

I have said the prophet informed Zerubbabel of the truth of my text to encourage him. We may use it for the same end, as laborers upon the temple now building. This is an age of building, doing, but none too much so, if our motto is, "*not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.*" We may trust to things, good and valuable in themselves, to the harm of Zion. If a house of inviting elegance and comfort, a rich toned organ, a choir of Orpheus' fabled power, or even a ministry able and eloquent, or voluntary associations, or any thing of like nature, though good in themselves, if we rely upon them as workmen for Zion's walls in rearing God's spiritual house, our reliance is as groundless as though based upon automaton puppets. They, with all other, and the choicest instrumentalities, need to be sanctified and used by the Spirit, before they are one jot's remove from worthlessness. A chisel of the finest steel, a brush and paint of the nicest kind, are nothing but tools or instruments. So of all we bring to the work of the Lord. Though this truth is theoretically admitted, in our efforts to advance the kingdom of God in the earth, I submit, beloved, whether it has over us that magnetic polarity, that

holds our eyes, and hearts, and longing desires to the Holy Ghost for his blessing ? Has it the uniform action of an elementary law, in our spiritual existence, like that of nature over the needle ? Or is it the erratic comet-flame that now and then goes shooting amid the clouds of our theology ? In our religion, and personal piety, is it not more like the brand-light of night, than the great orb of all day ? Does it usher in, and carry off the glories of day, or merely indicate a torch is burning on the surrounding darkness ? As a tenet merely, it is a truth that might as well be entombed. All spiritual life, health, action, and usefulness, hinge upon it. Its whole worth and beauty consist in its vital, practical nature. There is no religion, not a pulse of life, not a breathing of piety without it. Let us feel then, day by day, that our best endeavors are mere instruments in the hands of the divine Spirit ; and since he condescends to use them, let it be our highest ambition to keep those hands well filled.

I have one reflection to make, and then I will relieve your patience.

We see how we may all promote our piety, and be useful. It is by cultivating the friendship, drinking in the mind, and living in the society of the Holy Spirit. Here, we are all upon a level. And as prayer is the appointed way to hold communion with heaven, he is the best mechanic for Zion's walls, who has a *beaten and much trod path in to the throne of grace*. He who tarries



long in the Mount of Conference with God, will like Moses, bring down among the people, the most radiant similitude of Deity. They will say he “has been with Christ,” and wears in “his body the marks of the Lord Jesus.”

A noted Orator of antiquity, on being asked what was the first requisite for an eloquent speaker, and the second, and the third, returned the same answer to the three questions severally. If in like manner, it is asked what is the first requisite for an efficient and useful Christian, the response is—prayer. If the second is asked for, I should answer—prayer ; and so, not only of the third, but the fourth, and the fifth, and the sixth, and on, and on, until it was equivalent to the Spirit’s injunction, “pray without ceasing.” Be a man filled with faith and the Holy Ghost, and as sure as the Spirit is wise and able to win souls, you will be so in him. May this house be the dwelling place of the Most High. May the man and the woman who treads within yonder doors, taste an atmosphere vital with the Spirit’s life, and redolent with the fragrant incense of prayer. Here, as in the holy of holies, may there be such visible indications of the Shekinah, that the blind shall see, and from the cloud may there come such audible oracles for your instruction and guidance, that the deaf shall hear, and live ; then while God builds you up “in the faith once given to the saints,” it will be your happiness to sing, ‘not by

might, nor by power, but by thy Spirit O God,' is thy temple built.

It cannot be inappropriate for me to add a few words to those in this assembly who are without hope. You see my impenitent hearer, from the nature, character, and office-work of the Holy Spirit, how much encouragement he affords you to seek Christ. Instead of feeling incited to do this, many offer it as an objection paramount to all exhortation and argument, that they are entirely dependant upon the Spirit. True, and God in love has told you this, for the same end he published it to Zerubbabel. It is your encouragement, obediently to submit to his claims ; not your lease to sin. Were it not for this faithful, sure guide and teacher, you might seek, but could never find Christ. As it is, the promise is sure. Concede you are right in your professed waiting for the Spirit, to convert you. Then you are innocent for remaining as you are, and of course, have no need of repentance ; for what is the duty of the Spirit, is not, cannot be, your guilt. Suppose you wait in this state—a year—through life, and go to the judgment unconverted ? When God shall call you into account, you might turn round, and before the whole intelligent Universe, publicly impeach the third Person of the glorious Trinity, with your ruin. Yea, more ; you might charge him with being an incendiary in the God-head, frustrating the boundless love of the Father, and the matchless compassion of Jesus, to lost

sinner. O, Sir, will you peril the thought even? No—Let God be just, though our whole race be flung into hell. Heathen mythology relates that all the Gods were invited to the nuptials of Pelius and Thetis, but Discord; and that to revenge her neglect, she contrived to introduce envy and dissension among them. But no sinner at the marriage of “the bride, the Lamb’s wife,” will poison the unity and blessedness of the “Three One,” by any professed delinquency of the Spirit. The lost, will be self-ruined; and it will be one of the bitterest ingredients in their woes, that the sovereign love of the Father was so full, the sacrifice of the Son so real and free, and the invitations of the blessed Spirit so sincere, and his proffered aid so repeatedly and wickedly resisted. My dear hearer, may God forbid this to be your unhappy experience. And that it may not, “see that ye refuse not him that speaketh; for if they escaped not who refused him that spoke on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven.”